

## Scenic Resources

Scenery on the Santa Barbara coast is world-renowned. The 76-mile rural coastline is a unique combination of striking scenic beauty and rich biological and cultural resources providing exceptional opportunities for coastal enjoyment. The study area is comprised of bluffs, rocky points, beaches, headlands, bays, and coves along the coast with dramatic scenic views of Los Padres National Forest and the Santa Barbara Channel. According to the Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan, the scenic quality of the area from Gaviota State Park to the Guadalupe Dunes north of Point Sal is a visual resource of national significance.

The study area is a largely undeveloped, scenic, agricultural area with a few canyons containing industrial sites. The historic Point Conception lighthouse and accompanying structures add to its scenic beauty. The majority of Vandenberg AFB is undeveloped and has thus been able to maintain scenic beauty and high wildlife value. The Gaviota Coast study area is the largest continuous stretch of undeveloped coastal land in Southern California. Although the coastal area between Coal Oil Point and Point Sal comprises only 15% of Southern California's Coast, it holds approximately 50% of its remaining rural coastline.



Gaviota State Park, NPS photo

The following is a brief description of the scenic qualities of the Gaviota Coast going from Point Sal east to Coal Oil Point. The Bureau of Land Management completed an inventory of coastal recreation and aesthetic resources of the California coast in 1981. Because the change in scenic

resources has been negligible in the western parts of the study area and the Vandenberg coast, the BLM analysis included in the discussion below is still relevant.

**Point Sal Area.** The Point Sal area displays a varied geology with excellent exposures of unique features. Dramatic topography including offshore rocks, sandy, and rocky beaches characterizes the coastline at the northern end of the study area near Point Sal. Sand dune headlands and coastal terraces are the principle landforms. Military structures, including missile-firing installations, are sited at Vandenberg AFB. Dunes, the Point Sal headlands, and the Casmalia Hills support a varied wildlife population while the rocky shoreline at Point Sal provides habitat for marine mammals. The most important aesthetic resources in this area include the rocky water's edge and scenic hillsides and shoreline of Point Sal. Oil platform Irene may be seen from this area when visibility allows.<sup>232</sup>

**Purisima Point.** Long sandy beaches, offshore rocks, and rocky beaches characterize the coastline in the area around Purisima Point. Sand hill headlands and low coastal terraces north and south of Purisima Point are the principal landforms. The rocky shoreline at Purisima Point provides habitat for marine mammals. The Point itself has been identified as one of "the most important aesthetic



Coal Oil Point Beach, NPS photo

resources" in the area, although military structures at Vandenberg AFB dot the landscape. South of Purisima Point to the Santa Ynez River, the area features low coastal terraces, low sand dunes and a flat sandy strand. Ocean Beach County Park, the only public access in the area, also features an

estuary, wetlands, and a stream corridor. Platform Irene may be seen from this area when visibility allows. The coastal route of the Union Pacific Railroad traverses the area along the coast starting south of Purisima Point, offering rail passengers spectacular views of bluffs and headlands against the backdrop of the Purisima Hills.<sup>233</sup>

**Santa Ynez River to Jalama.** Offshore rocks, sandy, and rocky beaches characterize the coastline in this area. Point Pedernales is a marine mammal haul-out site and a seabird nesting area. Low coastal terraces with rolling, relatively barren foothills extend from south of Point Pedernales to Jalama. Drainage swales meander out of the foothills and cut through the terraces to a rocky shoreline exposed to the north of Rocky Point but slightly more sheltered to the south. The water's edge between Point Pedernales and Rocky Point is described as "exceedingly dramatic" with offshore rocks, rocky intertidal areas, small rocky and sandy pocket beaches accenting wave-cut terraces.<sup>234</sup> The Coast Guard Lifeboat Rescue Station buildings at Point Arguello enhance the picturesque nature of this area. Jalama Beach County Park provides the only public access to this area and features coastal foothills, sandy beaches, and headlands. Several oil platforms are visible from this area when visibility allows. The coastal route of the Union Pacific Railroad traverses the area along the coast, affording rail passengers spectacular coastal views.

**Jalama to Coal Oil Point.** A moderately rolling high coastal terrace, sandy beaches and coves, and steep, stream-cut canyons leading to the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountain range characterize the coastline in this area. State parks, sandy beaches, popular surfing breaks, riparian canyons, occasional riparian areas at stream outfalls to the ocean, and ocean views of the Channel Islands are among the most important aesthetic features of this area.<sup>235</sup> The area also includes cultural modifications including the presence of offshore platforms and onshore oil and gas infrastructure, a major resort hotel, and residential areas of Goleta and Isla Vista extending from the urban growth boundary eastward to the Coal Oil Point Reserve. The area is traversed east to west by California's main north to south transportation corridor, U.S. Highway 101 and the Southern Pacific Railroad. Miles of power lines parallel the corridor from Goleta to Gaviota. This segment of U.S. Highway 101 is eligible for designation as a California Scenic Highway, but the designation has not been made. However, the County has, in all areas where there are views from U.S. Highway 101 to the ocean, established a View Corridor Overlay designation in the coastal zoning ordinance and local coastal plan. The County Board of Architectural Review reviews all development in this area to ensure that visual resources are protected.



new citrus from Refugio Road, NPS photo



coastal view, NPS photo

## Recreational Resources

The Gaviota Coast provides recreational opportunities to a local county population of 400,000. Regionally, the Gaviota Coast is approximately 100 miles from the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the second largest metropolitan area in the country. In addition, the study area is approximately 275 miles from the San Francisco Bay Area, the fifth largest metropolitan area in the nation.

### EXISTING COASTAL ACCESS FOR RECREATION

Access to coastal resources varies throughout the study area. Coastal access ranges from strictly private beaches along areas such as Hollister Ranch and highly restrictive public access on Vandenberg AFB to easily accessible state- and county-owned parks and beaches. The following section describes existing coastal access throughout the study area.

Access to Point Sal in the northern end of the study area is difficult. The road access to the state beach is impassable by vehicles due to road failures and wash-outs. Visitors can access this area only if they take the challenging hike in from the north of Point Sal.

Designated beach access along six miles of the Vandenberg AFB coast occurs through Jalama Beach and Ocean Beach county parks except during seasonal restrictions from March through September, to protect the federally-threatened western snowy plover. In 2000, beach access was limited seasonally to a one quarter-mile and one half-mile sections in two locations. All public access is restricted on days when Vandenberg AFB is closed for space and missile launches.

Despite restricted access due to seasonal and periodic closures, Vandenberg AFB allows a limited amount of public access for fishing, wildlife viewing, and beach recreation. Permits and advance reservations are required for public access in areas that are not part of the county parks and beaches. Limited permits are available for fishing on nine miles of the Vandenberg AFB coast. Access



top: view from Amtrak, NPS photo  
bottom: El Capitan State Beach, NPS photo

is granted only on weekends and holidays for up to 50 people, although in 1999 typical access was 35 people. A wildlife viewing sanctuary at the Santa Ynez River includes a portion of the estuary that can be viewed from Ocean Beach County Park. The Waterfowl Natural Resource Area, a joint effort between the Vandenberg AFB, La Purisima Audubon Society, and the California Coastal Conservancy, is accessible to groups through Vandenberg AFB on an advance-reservation basis.

Limited public access on Vandenberg AFB has also been proposed for the Bishop Pine Scenic Area; the Barka Slough Trail System; a geological trail through the Point Sal ophiolite complex; a recreational retracement route for the portion of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail that passes through Vandenberg AFB; and an interpretive drive to visit major unique and interesting sites on the base. Security concerns and lack of funding have limited Vandenberg AFB from developing some of the controlled access

proposals. Even if developed, some of these areas will likely be restricted to base personnel and base-escorted field trips due to security concerns.

Jalama Beach County Park provides the only public access to the area between the southern boundary of Vandenberg AFB and Gaviota State Park. Jalama Beach County Park features wetlands, bluffs, coastal foothills, and a sandy beach. Located at the mouth of Jalama Creek, it offers a variety of coastal-enhanced and coastal-dependent day and overnight recreational uses. In 1999, the beach had health advisories posted for 192 days. These advisories were triggered by rain events or agricultural runoff.

The land between Jalama Beach and Gaviota State Park is privately-owned and public access is not allowed. Public access from Gaviota State Park east to Coal Oil Point consists of Gaviota State Park, Refugio State Beach, El Capitan State Beach, Haskell's Beach/Bacara Resort, beach access at Sandpiper Golf Course, and the Coal Oil Point Reserve. Generally, the beaches in this area enjoy greater usage with the milder ocean temperatures and meteorological conditions than the beaches north of Point Conception. On U.S. Highway 101, between Gaviota State Park and Refugio State Beach, there are vehicle pull-off areas from which State beaches may be accessed.

In the Ellwood area, Santa Barbara Shores County Park offers no direct access to the beach from the bluff top. However, the beach is accessible as a

normally continuous strand (depending on the tides) extending from Coal Oil Point to Sandpiper Golf Course to the recently improved public access at Haskell's Beach/Bacara Resort. This strand serves as beach access for residents of the western portion of Goleta and Isla Vista.

### EXISTING PUBLIC PARKS AND BEACHES

Coastal recreation units in the vicinity of Point Sal include The Nature Conservancy's Nipomo Dunes Preserve to the north and Point Sal State Beach. Point Sal State Beach is currently closed to vehicular access, due to slides and subsequent closure of the access road. Before the access road was closed, access to the State Beach was sometimes restricted during launches at Vandenberg AFB.

Federal lands used for recreational open space include the Los Padres National Forest and Vandenberg AFB. The Los Padres National Forest covers a large portion of the Santa Ynez mountain range in the eastern section of the study area. The Forest Service manages approximately 20,400 acres and features a number of trails. The striking canyons along the coast provide opportunities for trails to connect the Los Padres National Forest to the shoreline. The County recently completed a feasibility study for a coast to crest trail connection on its Baron Ranch property adjacent to Tajiguas Canyon. Additional crest to coast connections are a possibility at the Arroyo Hondo Preserve and the future state park at El Capitan Ranch.



El Capitan State Beach, NPS photo



Gaviota State Park, NPS photo

Vandenberg AFB has conducted several studies to determine sites of cultural and natural significance that could be available for interpretation and public enjoyment. Recreational opportunities on the base include camping, surfing, swimming, diving, picnicking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, birding, bee-keeping, bicycling, hiking, beach combing, whale watching and off-road vehicle use. While most of these activities and areas are restricted to active and retired duty military and their dependents, there are several existing and proposed recreational areas that are available to the general public on a limited basis.

State parks are classified into specific types based on their natural and cultural resources as well as their location and size. State parks, state beaches, and beaches access areas include: Gaviota State Park, El Capitan and Refugio state beaches, Canada del Leon, Canada San Onofre, Canada del Molino, Canada de Guillermo, Corral Beach, Phillips Tajiguas West and the Gaviota State Park campground. Portions of the El Capitan Ranch were recently acquired by the Trust for Public Land and have been transferred to the state for the development of a new park. County parks include Jalama Beach County Park, Ocean Beach County Park, and Santa Barbara Shores County Park.

Privately managed recreational areas also provide opportunities for public enjoyment within the study area. Arroyo Hondo, recently acquired by the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, will provide trails for occasional public use. A private campground area with trails is located just north of El Capitan State Beach.

### **CURRENT PARK VISITATION**

Total visitation to parks within the study area exceeded 1.1 million in 1999, not including visitation to the Los Padres National Forest. Visitation trends for individual park units within the study area are incomplete. However, those figures which are available show substantial use. Annual state park attendance within the study area averaged approximately 578,860 during the last six years. Attendance for county parks was 111,980 for July 2001 to June 2002.

Ocean Beach County Park experienced a substantial drop in attendance of 22% in 2002 after the park began annual closures of six months to ensure the survival of the snowy plover. Additional beach access areas for the north County areas have not been provided to compensate for the loss of closures during the snowy plover nesting season. However, future expansion plans for Jalama Beach County Park could assist in alleviating additional demands for beach access created by closures of Ocean Beach County Park.<sup>236-237</sup>

### **COASTAL TRAIL PLANS**

The development of a coastal trail along the Gaviota coast has been a high priority for local, state, and federal governments in efforts to provide better public access. The Draft Santa Barbara Coastal Access Implementation Plan identifies important recreational resources along a portion of the proposed Coastal Trail. Resources include beach access, wildlife areas, reefs, coastal lagoons, rocky intertidal areas, tide pools, surfing sites, and monarch butterfly migration habitat. Recommendations for implementing the Coastal Trail include providing more opportunities for vertical easements, proposed coastal trails, and facilities to access the coast. A 3-mile section of the Coastal Trail exists from El Capitan State Park to Refugio State Park, and a ¾ mile section at El Capitan Ranch was recently constructed. A proposed corridor that would connect this trail to Gaviota State Beach is under review by the County of Santa Barbara. Proposed locations for the coastal trail align with the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail.

## Notes

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bottom right: John Game; all others, NPS photos